

CD # 400

Helen Stevens

Interviewed by Ellen Kiever

Transcribed by Elaine Carr

June 19, 2006

My name is Ellen Kiever. I am here with Helen Stevens. Today is June 19, 2006. We're going to do an oral history interview with Helen on this day.

Ellen: Helen, let me tell you a little bit about this. Doris is writing a healers book. She is trying to put in various chapters on the doctors. She's writing a chapter Doctor Lloyd, Doctor Hullinger, Doctor Spendlove, Doctor Seager, Doctor Stringham, Doctor Allen, Doctor Buckston from over at Roosevelt is participating. She wants to have a nurses perspective on this. We've interviewed Beth Sweatfield and she was hoping you could share some of your experiences, so maybe when we're talking, you'll have a recollection that might come. No matter where we are in the interview if you have a recollection, just say, "I want to tell you something." And we'll just break in and tell that. What is your birthdate?

Helen: It is October 23, 1921.

ESK: Your two years older than my dad then. He was born in 1923. Were you born in Vernal?

HS: No. I was born in Colorado.

ESK: So what you brought your family to Vernal?

HS: Oh, I wouldn't know.

ESK: Your parents are.....

HS: My natural father was Peter Hackler. He was killed in an accident and then my mother remarried J.W. Stevens.

ESK: So, he was your father growing up. So, Frank is your brother?

HS: Yes, Frank is my brother. I have a brother and a sister.

ESK: So Frank goes by Hackler and you go by Stevens. Was Stevens your married name?

HS: No, Taylor was my married name, but I was legally adopted, and when Frank went into the Army, he had to use his name according to the records. So that's the way that happened.

ESK: So at what age did you move to Vernal?

HS: I was three years old.

ESK: Okay, so you went to school through here.

HS: Yes, I attended all the schools in Vernal, first grade on through high school.

ESK: Do you remember any of your teachers, a special teacher of any sort?

HS: Well, lets see, I remember one when I was in the third grade. An interesting thing happened with that. She was really a kind of strict, ornery teacher, that the kids all were afraid of, and I remember one time. Her sister-in-law, she married this friend of mines sister. We were talking one day and I said, "You know the meanest the teacher I ever had." And she said, "Who was it?" And, I told her and she said, "Well, she's my sister-in-law." Anyway, she was married to Thort Hatch.

ESK: Was this at Central School?

HS: Yes, right here at Central School?

ESK: So your father died. And your step father, was he the dentist?

HS: Yes.

ESK: Do you have any fond memories of your mom or dad. Would you have any that you would like to share with us.

HS: Well, I don't think any that any one would be interested in.

ESK: What was your favorite subject in school.

HS: I think probably science.

ESK: You had that interest. Did anything happen to you in school that was funny or.

HS: Well, I'll tell you what, you know so many years ago, I just wouldn't remember that.

ESK: In growing up, you graduated from Uintah High School?

HS: Yes.

ESK: Was that when it was blue and white and not red and white?

HS: No, it's always been red and white since I knew it.

ESK: Henry Schaefermeyer's nephew brought some things down the other day and then Liz Sowards brought some things of her sister-in-law, and it was blue and white. And I said I didn't know it was blue and white.

HS: Maybe they went to Union.

ESK: Did you go to college right after and to nurses training? How did you receive your nurses training?

HS: I went to Holy Cross Hospital for nurses training right after I got out of high school. That was when it was a three year program.

ESK: And, you went right into it? You didn't have to take any of the pre-requisites like English or Math.

HS: Oh, no. They didn't do that then. Just high school. You got in from high school.

ESK: And they just brought you to Holy Cross.

HS: Yes.

ESK: And that hospital is now that Salt Lake Regional Medical Center?

HS: That's right. I think they shut their nursing program down, probably in the early fifties. I imagine it was during the world war when they had their last class that went through. Then they went to a four year program. I guess now it's just all kinds of programs, it's a two year, three year, or four year.

ESK: Yes, depending what you want to take and how far you want to go with it.

HS: They have a LPN, then a RN, and then a VS.

ESK: My daughter right now is a CNA (Certified Nurses Assistant).

HS: We were all those things. We went from the house keeper to..

ESK: Yes, that's what Reva Allred told me. She said she was everything and her husband was everything too. The hospital administrator on the janitors day off, he was even the janitor at the hospital. Did our hospital work that way? Do you remember whether people kind of pitched in and made it work.

HS: I think everybody cooperated more than they do now. I mean everybody has their specific duties that they do and they don't deviate much from that. But, I think it was more of a unit earlier. Well, it was smaller than it is now.

ESK: My aunt Pat was a nurse, Pat Searle.

HS: Oh yeah, I knew Pat really well.

ESK: She was there a long time it seemed like. Did you work for any doctors in town?

HS: No, I didn't. I went into Public Health. When I first graduated, I came out to Vernal and I worked nights one month here and then I worked in Public Health in Davis County for about eighteen months, then I went up to the University of Washington and got a degree in Public Health. And, then I came back to Vernal and worked in Public Health. Actually, I used to go up when they were short of help and work at the hospital. So, I had that experience of what went on up there, but other than that, I worked in Public Health.

ESK: Well, I didn't understand that, so I'm glad you explained that to me. So, you didn't really work closely with any of the doctors?

HS: Oh, yeah. We set up most of the programs that grew from early public health nursing now. We set up the mental health programs. That was an interesting one, because that was set primarily as a charter. It was set up under a nonprofit charter. Then, evolved into the mental health they have now set up. But, it started originally with Dr. Young. He was a physician here about that time and Dr. Herb Fowler was here. Then he took a post in psychiatry and he was interested to know, having lived here in this area, and he was interested in mental health. So, a group got together and we set up the original mental health clinic, which was nonprofit.

ESK: And where was it located?

HS: At the hospital here in Vernal. It was sort of with the county and the state and all contributed, but the people that come in would pay what they could afford to pay. Then it just evolved into the mental health program that they have now. But, that's the way it started.

ESK: Well, that's interesting.

HS: The public health nurses probably throughout the state set up most of the itinerant programs throughout the state in those days. It was through the public health nursing programs.

ESK: I had no idea that the public health did that much.

HS: Oh, yes, they set up the immunization programs, did so much more. They did a lot because in the early time they weren't dictated what to do. They had the initiative to go ahead and set up any program that they thought they had a need in the community, and worked closely with the physicians, the county commissioners and the school board to set up these programs. We did immunization clinics in the schools for typhoid and smallpox. We received the smallpox vaccine from the state, and it was free. So, the only expense we had were what the doctors charged. But a lot of times the doctors would go for free and then the money that we said, this was before they had all these programs that children could get free vision and tonsillectomies. And, we set up this program that was a school, and Dr. Spendlove was always one that was really supportive of this type of a program. The money that we took in from the clinics, which a lot of was just, we got the vaccine free so it was just money that we charged, I think it was twenty-five cents a shot or something like that. It went into this Uintah School District Health Committee and then if any child needed health care in the community that didn't have the money. This was

before all the Medicaid programs. Then they had a resource they could get.

ESK: A fund they could fall back on.

HS: Yes.

ESK: That's nice. I remember going to the court house when the polio shot first came out and having the polio shot. I'm not one for shots and I just didn't care for that. Did you have any favorites you like to work with as far as the doctors? You mentioned Dr. Spendlove was always real supportive of you.

HS: Well, I think Dr. Spendlove was the one that always gave so much community service.

ESK: Well that's who we went to when we were young. He was kind of..

HS: Well, I think the others, I don't think they had as much interest in community health service that they gave of themselves. I think the others would go out on educational programs and things like that but not the immunization program.

ESK: I remember Alta Rust. Did you work with Alta?

HS: Oh, yes. Alta was really a gem.

ESK: I remember her voice, it was just a different voice.

HS: Alta was one of the nicest people I've ever known.

ESK: I always wanted her to give my shots because she didn't hurt as bad and as..

HS: That's because she was nice.

ESK: That's because she was just a special lady.

HS: Alta was an unusual person. She really was.

ESK: She had a wonderful family. And they've got good kids. How many years were you working in this public health? You retired there.

HS: I worked in public health about eighteen years and then I went back and got my BS degree. Then I left nursing and went and did speech pathology, audiology.

ESK: Okay, Ruey Eaton said that she remembered you doing hearing tests at the hospital.

HS: Yes.

ESK: Did you do speech therapy also?

HS: Yes.

ESK: I didn't know all these services were available.

HS: Well, I'm not so sure they have all these things now. I don't know what the public health nurses do. I think they have immunization clinics in their office. But I don't think they have the programs that we had when it was first initiated. And then they really don't have the ability to set up their own programs. I think there is more control now than there was.

ESK: They do what someone else tells them to do.

HS: Yes, that's true. And initially you just had the ability to set up programs and do what you felt that there was a need. Now I think they have restricted more. They programs set up, but they do what is already set up for them.

ESK: Now back to kind of your childhood. You've got your sister living with you. Was she your best friend also?

HS: Oh, I had lots of good friends.

ESK: And associates here in Vernal. We have a lot of good people here.

HS: Oh, yeah. There's good people everywhere.

ESK: I brought the DUP book with your picture in it.

HS: That's really a good one isn't it.

ESK: And Doris reminded me, she said, "Ask here if she has a picture that she would be willing to share, a picture or two of your nursing." Did you work at the Uinta Basin Hospital?

HS: I worked their the nights when I first got out of training. One month of nights. And then I worked at the hospital when ever they had someone that they was short of help.

SK: You'd cover for them. That was nice. They put this [picture] in the DUP book and I thought it doesn't look like you.

HS: No, I don't think I looked like me then. Pictures are different aren't they?

ESK: Pictures are different. Doris did ask if you had a picture or two if that you'd be willing to share in a nurse type uniform or in employment situation. Do you remember of any pictures that you might have had taken that you'd be willing to share with us so we could put them in a little...

HS: I'd have to dig them out, but I will go look.

ESK: Well, if you'd do that we would appreciate it. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me concerning anything. Just not the nurses, because if somebody comes in and read this some day, what would they like to know about Helen Stevens?

HS: I don't know. Probably nothing.

ESK: You know we have people come in and they're looking all the time for different people.

HS: Oh, is that right. That's interesting.

ESK: It's so interesting. Now last Friday we had somebody come in and look for Thomas Bingham Senior. We pulled him up on the computer and we were able to give them some information on them. So one of these days someone might come in and look for county health workers and they'll find you. I'm giving you the opportunity to maybe say a little bit about, "I enjoyed my job, I loved my job, I thought it was great."

HS: Well, I think we all like the jobs we are in or we wouldn't do them.

ESK: That's so true.

HS: Not very much information.

ESK: Well, it will be enough for Doris to get a little bit of for this. I appreciate you sharing with us.